blood or on that of other animals as some have reported; rather 262
do they make their principal diet of fish, game, and the roots 272
and fruits of the field with which, together with wild forest honey
which is so abundant, they prepare the fermented beverages I
have already spoken about.

He who spends any time among the Indians finds cause to 732●
marvel at the lack of cripples or maimed people. From this fact
certain travelers have gone on to affirm that the Indians, like
latter day Spartans, kill off their malformed babies. This is also
the opinion of some historians.

[221] I, on the other hand, although confirming the fact
of their being no cripples by my own personal observation, ex-
plain the phenomenon by attributing it to the physical and social
condition in which the Indians live. A more than free life, gen-
erally sufficient food (in spite of what may be said to the con-
trary); the nakedness of the women -- that is, their lack of tight
garments about their waists and breasts; the healthful climate
(for them at least), all are physical elements conducive to the
great rarity of cases of deformity in the body structure of their
babies.

Furthermore, the constant state of war, the frequent sur-
prise attacks, the custom of giving no quarter, the wild beasts
and reptiles, all conspire against the handicapped who are
inferior in the indispensable faculties necessary in the struggle
for existence. In addition to this it is probable that malformed
children are not accorded the privilege granted their normal
peers, that is, that their lives be spared by victorious enemies,
and they be carried off to the latters' villages there to be raised
as members of the kidnapers' group and thus contribute to its
strength and progress.

All this then explains sufficiently the lack of deformed
individuals without the need to attribute to the Indians the habit
of killing newborn babies or allowing them to die. My personal
experience allows me to set down a positive happening which
gives the lie to such a supposition.

In the very center of the Chaco I came upon a deaf-mute
Indian who must have been a little over thirty years of age.
Really, if there is any defect which makes a man completely
useless and deserving of being eliminated from society, this is
it. However, it is true also that it is one of those imperfections

which even in the most favorable physical circumstances can occur quite often among children who are the offspring of parents who are too closely consanguineous. Marriages of this type (between close relatives) are not rare here, and -- this is not just an extra trip bearing grist for my mill -- I have been assured that of the very small number of defective persons these latter, the deaf-mute, are the least rare among the Indians of these parts; among whom, let it be said, I have not seen a single cretin or cotudo [coto is a malignant swelling of the throat -- Translator] and that in spite of the fact that aberrants of this type abound in the north and western part of the Republic.

To come back to my deaf-mute: The occasion of my meeting him was brought about by his having been attacked by a tiger [jaguar--Translator] which mauled him horribly while he was gathering firewood. (This is one further proof as to the difficulty of putting up a successful struggle for life in these waste places if one is not in the full possession of all one's senses). We were called to treat the poor wretch, but he refused our ministrations energetically, preferring to put himself in the hands of the witch doctors.

Despite what I have stated above, the Indians themselves have assured me that it sometimes [222] happens that a mother will allow her children to die if their father or any other man who will care for them dies or goes away.

However, this must happen only very seldom (and does not weaken our argument regarding the handicapped) for among the inhabitants of a given village and particularly between relatives there exists a truly charming sharing of goods -- yet when food is scarce one may suppose that the phenomenon is more common. But such a state of food scarcity is probably felt less owing to the great variety of foods acceptable to the Indians and their really remarkable adaptability to the availability of food: they can live on a very skimpy diet when need arises, and then gorge themselves with a vengeance when they hit a time of plenty.

The elasticity of the stomachs of these savages is truly extraordinary. When not on the march a mouthful of food is enough for them: while fresh air, the exertions of the hunt, of fishing, of harvesting and of traveling in pursuit of these activities